

OUR PERFECT LIFE

After a scheduled morning meeting with my business partner I made comment that I felt this was going to be a great and rewarding year for both of us. Boy, was I wrong, this was the day of February [REDACTED] the night of Preston's Year 12 school ball. I remember coming home around 4pm, he arrived home shortly after. He had been to the beach and I asked him if he had been for a spray tan. He replied he didn't want to destroy a perfect body.

He was all excited and eager to get in his new suit for the big night. He had a glow about him, something that was always there but this had added excitement. He entered his room and I prompted him to hurry up as his mother was coming to get him to attend the pre ball photos. No doubt all his school friends would be waiting for him. I went back to the entrance of his room and found him glaring into his cupboard with both doors wide open. I walked over and on the top shelf in a perfect line I sighted all my aftershaves that had randomly disappeared over the previous months. When I asked the simplest of questions "what are you doing with all my after shaves?" I had a simple response "well it would be a waste on you if you used them." Simple in context, polite but true. That was Preston, he had an answer for everything.

At 5.30pm Preston was joined by a friend, they came out of his room both dressed immaculately, black suits, cocktail bow ties and those matching cheeky grins. The boys were ready for the night of their lives. They departed with Preston's mother for the pre ball photos. Before leaving I took a picture and arranged to pick him up from the ball at closing time.

Later that night I waited in the foyer at the convention centre and at 11.30pm he departed surrounded by many friends, this was Preston. A party or gathering was not the same if he wasn't there. The ultimate practical joker but the one that would stay

back and help the parents clean up. Preston was a sportsman, Record breaker in Athletics, Fairest and Best in Baseball, hockey, football, winning in most age groups of his sporting career. A Claremont Colt squad member, School captain, School prefect, Champion boy, he had it all. The envy of many, the one to beat.

On leaving the ball with the normal vehicle full of his friends we travelled to my house so they could get changed and off to the after party. I dropped them off at 12.30am and I remember my final words to him, stay safe ring me when you are finished and I will pick you up. His reply was simple, "Dad, what do you think I am an idiot." They were the last words that were spoken, I will never forget them.

At 3.30am I text him and he replied that he will stay at the house where the party was and help clean up in the morning. This was not uncommon for him.

At 9am my daughter Aimee suggested we go for breakfast. We decided it was such a beautiful morning that we would go to a café on the beach. This was an activity that we did on a regular basis. We decided to call Preston to see where he was so he could join us. We text him but had no reply. We rang his number but no reply. On driving along the main highway we came across Police cars and Ambulances at a popular beach resort. On the side driveway was what appeared to be a body under a white sheet. I remember saying to Aimee Oh my god I think someone has fallen from a balcony. Disturbed by this we attempted to ring Preston again but no answer. I kept driving to the café and suddenly a cold shudder crossed my body, I looked at Aimee and I said I think that was Preston. Aimee to my amazement agreed as she had the same chilling feeling. I turned the car around and drove back to the scene. The body was gone and the Ambulance had left. In attendance were several Police and some very familiar teenage faces. I crossed the road and all I could think was Preston just show your face, step out from behind a wall whatever, I didn't care. I looked into the eyes of one of his best friends and all I could see was him trying to say

Preston's name. I knew at that moment it was Preston. The local Police in attendance gave us the news that he had fallen from a two storey balcony and had suffered a severe head injury.

We left the scene and picked up Preston's mother from her home and raced directly to the Hospital. On arrival at the emergency section of Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital we were greeted by an entourage of medical staff, this vision did not look promising. We just wanted to see our son and Aimee wanted to be with her brother. We entered the ICU unit and here we saw this perfect specimen of a teenage boy on a hospital bed with tubes and wires going everywhere. He looked peaceful but lifeless. We stayed with him just sitting looking and shedding many tears. I remember thinking this is our boy, what the hell has happened. His vitals were stable, he remained lifeless but peaceful. I left his bedside for a few hours and I had to ask questions in relation to what happened to him.

A teenager that was with him in the morning said that one of the school students turned up at the resort and gave Preston and the other boys in the room tabs of synthetic acid. The teenager made mention that the boy that handed out the drugs said he bought them from Silk Road. I was wondering what suburb Silk Road was in. I was then told that Silk Road was a website that you can buy drugs from. Call me naïve but I had no idea that this was possible. I decided that after the heat died down I would investigate more. Throughout the day we had an entourage of friends and family coming to see him. We allowed family and some close friends to visit his room but kept it to a minimum. I decided to remain with Preston during the night.

At 5.25am the following day I remained next to his bedside and I could hear the sounds of loud constant beeps, this seemed a concern to the nurse in attendance. I remember asking what that noise was, she hesitantly replied that was his blood pressure. As I glanced over to the machine and noticed the reading was increased to 252 over 230 this couldn't be good. I placed my hand on this forehead and it felt like it was about to explode. It was at this point I caught a glimpse of the nurse; she made an

indication to a colleague with a slight shake of her head. I knew at this point Preston was not going to survive. Again, this vision will remain with me forever. I was asked to telephone Aimee and Preston's mum and ask them to come to the hospital. They joined me a few hours later and we remained with him. At this point his blood pressure had returned to normal and now I was totally confused.

Preston was moved to a room to allow privacy for family and friends. We had many updates on Preston's condition over the course of the day but unfortunately nothing overly positive. At around 11am we were told by one of the nursing staff that a group of Preston's friends and parents were gathering in the waiting area. To my surprise the automatic doors opened and I was greeted with a packed house. 120 to 150 people had gathered waiting for news. It was then decided that we let his friends visit his bedside. We allowed groups of 8 to visit him at each time. This wasn't the easiest decision for us to make but it served a purpose. The teenagers had the chance to see what happens when things go terribly wrong. I have never experienced a tragedy in this way and the sadness that was seen in the eyes of his close friends will never leave my memory. As teenage friends, parents and family were leaving the room they struggled to handle their emotions. This was a truly unbelievable sight. We stayed on through the night with Preston, with regular visits from family and friends. Many teenagers changed their clothing so they could be in disguise, so they could return to see him that one last time.

I stayed with Preston during the night just waiting for a positive sign but it did not happen. I remember clearly falling asleep for a few hours and when I woke I stared up at the ceiling and thought where the hell am I? I glanced over my right shoulder and saw Preston's head only a few feet away. The reality hit me so hard I cried uncontrollably. This was my beautiful son and he shouldn't be the one. I have always believed that children should outlive their parents and I was of the belief that this was not going to happen. It fascinates me when your mind can think like that in tragic circumstances.

Monday [REDACTED] February will always be a day I would like to forget. We were called in to a meeting room and greeted by the head nurse and the leading surgeon of the ICU. We were given the news that no parent will ever wanted to hear. Preston was pronounced brain dead at 3.48pm on this day. I remember looking at my daughter Aimee and trying to think what do I say, she has just lost her brother and I my son. You want to be angry but you cannot. What now, what do we do, it was all so surreal, he is no longer here, gone never to be seen again. The next decision was one of the easiest that my family had to face, the donation of Preston's organs. We were asked the question and immediately we responded in favour of it. If his life can save others this is exactly what Preston would want. The paperwork was completed and we agreed to all organs that are life saving to be made available. I remember going to the waiting area and stood there trying to explain the news of Preston's death to our immediate families and close friends. This was one of the most difficult times that I can remember. We had the pleasure of having Preston with us for two more days, they were the most precious days and I will always remember them. We allowed more visitors to see him but a decision was made that on the Wednesday morning before they took him away it would only be his mother, Aimee and myself with him.

On Wednesday at 11.45am it was time for Preston to leave. The surgeons from another hospital were in attendance and waiting in anticipation for Preston to be delivered. I remember walking beside him and as they pushed the bed past the waiting room I saw the faces of our friends and family as he left the area. This was the last time they were going to see him. We travelled in a lift to a designated floor where surgeons were waiting to operate. It was overwhelming to see the nurses that looked after Preston shedding tears. Everyone was emotional and I could only think that he touched their hearts in a different way, the only way he knew how to, just being him. It was obvious from the amount of visitors he had at the hospital it had an effect on many. This was the last time we were to see him. We said our

emotional goodbyes and returned to where our family was waiting.

That night was my first night home, I slept in Preston's bed. I just kept thinking this could not be happening, but it was and it was real. I had many tears that night and cried uncontrollably. It was not fair, not him, he did not deserve this at this young age.

Over the next few days we had meetings with the senior staff of Churchlands High school. They kindly offered to have a memorial service at the school on the day of our choosing. Over 1400 people attended the service and later that day we held a cremation service at Pinnaroo where a further 700 attended. The crowd was that big it flowed to the edges of the car-park.

Since the funeral many things have happened, football clubs playing for the Preston [REDACTED] Cup, tree planting service at the school, it has been so overwhelming.

Now I had to focus on something to take away the pain.

While waiting for the Council approval of a café I had time to reflect on the Silk Road issue. I could not believe that a website could sell drugs and not be closed down. To my disbelief it was true, the site could not be closed down due to some very advance software. This site was the conduit for selling drugs which allowed dealers and buyers to connect together to complete anonymous transactions. The more I considered it the more I blamed this Silk Road site. The site was responsible for my son's death. I will not allow this to happen to another family again. I had two choices in front of me, educate teenagers of the dangers of this website and the dangers of cheap and nasty drugs and show them the real reality of life and how it can destroy lives and families.

I have campaigned vigorously in Australia against this site and finding out about the arrest of the director of Silk Road, Ross Ulbricht brought many tears. I will still continue to campaign against these terrible sites as they are nothing but evil.

The Silk Road web site has been responsible for many deaths globally. You can buy any drug that you desire with no quality control. Ross Ulbricht does not know what is sold on his site, he does not care, it is all about money and greed. He shows no remorse regarding his actions and continues to try and convince everyone of his innocence.

At last Preston's Café has now been completed and we have now opened the doors. The venue will be for family and friends and the public to come and enjoy the atmosphere and celebrate Preston's short but most amazing and wonderful life. He was a true gift and words would never do him justice.

Life goes on in some ways but it is quite clear that the pain will never leave me, it will always remain, I now have no option but to try and manage and live with it.

Every night I go to bed crying and I must wake up and remind myself that I have a beautiful daughter who needs me even more than ever now.

I will never be able to understand what happened that night, my son is not a drug user and maybe peer pressure was an issue. The only issue I have is that if Silk Road did not exist then Preston would still be with us and for this reason I will continue to campaign against these Evil web sites.

Every day we are reminded of Preston in some way, those beautiful moments are now gone and we are only left with disbelief, sadness and despair and memories. As a human being I have always been scared of death but in some way when it is my turn to go I will be at peace. I know longer worry about death as I will hopefully one day be united with my beautiful boy. Rest in Peace my little buddy. DAD

Signed _____

WHS

